From the author.

A SERMON

Preached before the Vice-President and Council of the Clerical Union for the Maintenance and Defence of Catholic Principles, and the Catholic Club of Philadelphia

IN MEMORY OF

THE REVEREND HENRY ROBERT PERCIVAL, D. D.

IN

ST. MARK'S CHURCH

Philadelphia

November 10th, 1903

BY

THE REVEREND ROBERT RITCHIE, B. D.

Let thy talk be with the wise, and all thy communication in the law of the Most High.
And let just men eat and drink with thee; and let thy glorying be in the fear of the Lord.

—*Ecclesiasticus* ix, 15, 16.

God's Holy Name be praised for the life and example of Henry Robert Percival. It is good that He has put it into our hearts to recall at this time the great things He has done for us in this priest and doctor, who was and is still one of us. We need not be afraid of saying too much of all that we remember of his holiness and loveliness—for how can we ever say too much of the gracious gifts of God? Nor is it fitting that we should be overcome with grief, because, to adapt sacred words, we are confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work among us will perform it until the Day of Jesus Christ, not only here in our earthly lives, but in the soul of our brother also who has gone forward out of our sight.

Too often we hear people lamenting that those who have been the best, those who have comforted and strengthened their brethren, those whom we think we cannot spare, are taken away untimely. We must bow, they say, to the inscrutable mystery of this dispensation. But is it a mystery, in the light of the Gospel? Is it not in accord with the heavenward-calling voice which ever since our Lord came has been sounding so clearly? *Sursum Corda.* "Almighty and Everliving God, we yield unto Thee most high praise and hearty thanks, for the wonderful grace and virtue declared in all Thy saints who have been the choice vessels of Thy grace, and the lights of the world in their several generations." We will not lament that the time of their trial and suffering was not prolonged. Thy goodness is shown in that Thou hast given them to their brethren for just that time which seemed good in Thy sight and for no more. The gifts which Thou hast bestowed through them are the earnest that Thou wilt bless still.

Henry Percival was born in 1854, on the 30th of April. From his boyhood he heard the uplifting voice. I remember his telling me, when he could not have been more than ten years old, that his desire was to be a priest. Such a desire in his case could not be other than absorbing and continually active. His talks with his youthful companions were not infrequently upon matters and doctrines of the Church. But with it all there was sweetness of disposition, good humour and geniality, so that the average boy, and even those poor fellows who have never seemed to see the light, were drawn to him and respected him. Al-

ways a student, and endowed with great intellectual powers, he took his college course and graduated at an early age. As befitted his sacred aspirations, his post-graduate study was in Latin. He attained the degree of Master of Arts in 1875. Three years must yet elapse before he could be ordained to the priesthood, and so there was time for travel. In Germany, Italy, France and England he filled his wonderful memory and his heart with the glories of the great churches and the holy services there offered to God, with sacred music, paintings, sculptures, architectural magnificence, gathering a store of mental pictures upon which to feed all the rest of his life.

But these things to him were not mere delights enjoyed without judgment. His development was not partial or narrow. Art, to him, was the ever glorious handmaid of faith, and the subject of all his learning was the Word of God. He had the happiness, which perhaps some even of our clergy have missed, of being fully possessed of the idea of the Church Catholic from the beginning of his reflective life. Next to faith and love, reason had her throne in his soul. What he believed and taught he clearly saw to be the very Word of God, and he would not believe or teach anything else.

This mental condition was very nearly ideal for one who sought the priesthood. He entered upon his candidacy for Holy Orders well furnished and well disposed, with sincere and holy purpose. But even in his youth, physical conditions were a hindrance. His health was not strong enough to enable him to enter into the life of the Theological Seminary. He accomplished his studies privately, under the guidance of distinguished clergymen, and was ordained deacon in 1877 and Priest in 1878 by Bishop Horatio Potter of New York. For some time he was able to perform the pastoral duties to which he was called, at Merchantville, New Jersey, at Christ Church Chapel, as assistant to the Rev. George Woolsey Hodge, and finally as Rector of the Church of the Evangelists. The way was not altogether smooth before him. Especially at the Church of the Evangelists, of which he took charge in 1881, he found much opposition and prejudice arrayed against him. We need not call up the particulars of the struggle. All its bitterness is past. All we have to do now is to remember the steadfast courage with which he defended that which he had sworn to maintain, and the loving gentleness with which he disarmed all who were arrayed against him. Many of these were converted to the truth by his calm and faithful dealing with them. He literally offered himself a sacrifice to his parish, soul and body, time, learning and substance.

There are not a few who remember his catechetical instructions on Friday evenings, in which he failed not to declare unto them the whole counsel of God—in which his wonderful faculty of teaching first excited interest and then implanted and strengthened faith in those who heard him. His visits and

ministrations to the poor and wretched among his people were like beams of light to them, and he was unremitting in this duty while he had strength to perform it. Those who know can testify that his pastoral work was full of grace and power. Was it successful? What is success? The account is hidden with the Judge; but men have seen enough of this parish priest's life to say that if the real watching for souls with tender love, with the diligent and effectual sowing of the seeds of faith in many, are the elements of pastoral success, then Dr. Percival was successful in his ministry—eminently successful.

When we priests are ordained we answer the questions of the Bishop and make our solemn vows before God; and the Bishop then says over us a benedictory prayer that God, who hath given us this will, will give unto us strength and power to perform the same; and the degree of fulfilment of this prayer is the just measure of our success. Among the vows there is no engagement to build up a strong financial institution or to gather a great personal following. Such building up may, for all we know, be possible without any real success in the ministry whatever. What the priest promises is to give faithful diligence in the administration of the Doctrine, Sacraments and Discipline of Christ's dear Church; to drive away erroneous and strange doctrines; to teach nothing but God's Word, and that completely, by public and private monitions and exhortations to the sick and to the whole as need shall require and as occasion shall be given; to be diligent in prayers and in reading the Holy Scriptures and in such studies as help to the knowledge of the same, laying aside the study of the world and the flesh; to frame and fashion himself and his family so that they may be examples of godliness; as much as lies in him to set forwards, quietness, peace and love among all Christian people; and reverently and gladly to obey and submit himself to the Bishop and the authorities of the Church. These vows represent the undertaking. Their fulfilment is success. It is clear therefore that Dr. Percival's life-work was an eminent success. He was so given to the study of the Scriptures and to sacred learning that many of us sought knowledge at his lips. He was so devoted to teaching that he was continually writing even after the failure of his bodily strength made him almost a prisoner. He was so ready to drive away erroneous and strange doctrines that we naturally wonder who is to be our sentinel now that he is gone—who is to stand on the wall with that ready trumpet now? In his hands it gave no uncertain sound. In this perplexity we can only remind ourselves of what he who is gone would certainly tell us, that there is always a Joshua to succeed Moses—that if we are faithful the same Lord will sound the alarm, when it is needed, by whomsoever He will.

Moreover, in obedience to his vows, Dr. Percival was not only a warrior but also a faithful subject. It would be hard to estimate how much has been

accomplished, in this diocese, and beyond it, by his careful and self-denying submission to his Bishop in the first seven years of his incumbency at the Church of the Evangelists. He was in the habit of using the word *distinguo*. He discerned the difference between *ceremonial* on the one hand, and *doctrine, sacraments, discipline* and, above all, *charity* on the other. He was not willing to be at variance with his bishop in matters of mere ceremonial even though he knew that his opinion in the matter was the right one. Thus it came to pass that the very telling, the startling spectacle was presented in his church of the priest saying daily Mass, hearing confessions, and teaching the whole Catholic Faith, without vestments, lights or incense. The integrity of doctrine and of Christian practice does not lie in ceremonies. They are signs and symbols of the continuous Catholicity of the Church, and they are lawful. But it is a sign and proof of our Catholicity and of our loyalty that we should be subject to the Bishop. I would not be understood to say that we ought not, *in some cases,* to to maintain even the lawful ceremonial in opposition to a particular bishop, for the bishop also is subject to the law of the Church; but mere ceremonies are not so essential that they must be fully performed at times when it is clear that charity, whether to the bishop or the people, demands their curtailment. Charity in such matters begets charity—and so a time came when Dr. Percival was able to announce that the ancient and lawful ceremonies would be fully restored in the Church of the Evangelists. I trust our beloved Bishop, who now presides over this Diocese, will not disapprove the statement that in these days he does not think of requiring that we shall be bound by his opinion in matters indifferent, but only expects that we shall be guided each by his own honest interpretation of the law.

In that law, in all church law, and in every department of theology, Dr. Percival was a ready and reliable authority. By this Council of the Clerical Union here assembled he was chosen as our theologian. We confidently relied upon his judgment as to the soundness of every paper published under the auspices of the society. When the Union was first formed no one of us was more instrumental than he in shaping our declaration of principles and our *credenda*. These had a positive and a negative side. The association was to exist for the purpose of maintaining and defending Catholic principles. Therefore we must first declare what Catholic principles are. In doing this, that wide learning, which makes unintentional errour as nearly impossible as may be, was contributed by Dr. Percival. In his book on *the Invocation of Saints* he has well described the distinction between doctrine and practice. The same distinction was borne in mind and made the basis of our declaration of principles. This declaration, though very concise, covers the ground; and we have not found any occasion to alter it during all the years of the society's existence. It is as follows:

"1. We hold that to be Catholic in Doctrine which can be proved to have been implicitly received from the beginning, and that which has from time to time been explicitly declared by the whole Church.

"2. We hold that to be Catholic in practice which can be proved to have been used by authority in all parts of the Church at any one time."

To these principles Dr. Percival had always given his adhesion, and throughout everything that he wrote or said, and in all the actions of his life as a priest and teacher of God's Word, they were paramount. To him the Church itself, mentally distinguished from any of its members, was *an entity*, a creature of God, the mystical Body of Christ. Therefore, however a saint might err, however a General Council might err, however a bishop of Rome might err, yet the entire body of the Church could never err in respect of the revelation of God's Truth which it received complete at the beginning of its existence. But as to its practice, founded always upon the original doctrine, the Church may change. To change in practice, or to vary in practice in different places, is not to err; but any variation of doctrine necessarily involves errour. No one on earth ever saw these things more clearly than Dr. Percival. He heard, and taught others to hear, the infallible voice of God the Holy Ghost in every universal doctrinal utterance of the Church, whether by one council, or by many synods all saying the same thing, or in whatever other way God ordains. In this assertion that there is an infallible Voice, by which a vast body of doctrine has been formulated and nothing contrary to the original deposit has ever been uttered, we have found the positive side of our declared principles. Whether we could have expressed the truth so well without the collaboration of Dr. Percival we do not know and need not inquire. We are satisfied to know and to thank God that we had him to encourage, correct and strengthen us at that stage of our work.

As to the negative portion of our declaration, in the case of an organization like ours, it must necessarily take the form of excluding by tests men who, although they are our dear brethren in the Church and the ministry, yet have not received the gift of understanding the Voice of the Holy Spirit in the Church, or who, at least, do not fully believe the truths so uttered to be Catholic and necessary. We exclude them for practical reasons, but we do not condemn them. We exclude them by tests. These are found in our four *credenda*. There is not time now to do more than epitomize articles already so well known. Our members are required to affirm their belief in the doctrine underlying Eucharistic adoration, in the necessity of the Apostolical Succession of the Priesthood, in the final termination of all probation at the end of this life, and in the plenary inspiration of Holy Scripture. These are only a few parts of the whole body of doctrine, and may be added to upon occasion; but hitherto they have proved sufficient. Because of them, if we have a small body, we have one that

is homogeneous. In selecting these *credenda* it was necessary to consider the present state of theological controversy and the speculative dangers that seemed most to threaten the members of our Church; and in this selection it will probably be admitted by all that no one contributed more, if any so much, as Dr. Percival. Not only his wide and accurate knowledge of theology, ancient and modern, but also his clear insight as to the ways of the world and the characters of men, notwithstanding his physically secluded life, contributed immensely to the making of these little formularies which have proved themselves so practically useful.

Those who are here, although not members of the Clerical Union (and we are exceedingly glad of their presence) will probably pardon my reference to its matters because it is hardly possible otherwise to give any just account of Dr. Percival's life. He rejoiced in being a member of this Union and his heart and soul were in all its operations.

But it was not only to those who thought as he did that his great goodness and his singular abilities afforded light and strength. Distinguished clergymen, bishops and others, from many places, and from many points of view, were glad to consult with him; and he was always very glad to do all that he could. In the great matter of Prayer Book Revision which occupied so many sessions of the General Convention, his help was most valuable and his influence deeply felt. In the question about Swedish orders also his investigations and conclusions were of very great value. He accomplished much with his pen; not only his books, but a vast number of magazine articles, of papers privately printed and circulated, of letters, contributions to church papers in this country and abroad, commentaries, meditations. These voluminous writings were upon a very wide range of subjects, but always religious. He had no time for anything but his Father's business. One might be tempted to think that he did little else but write during the latter part of his life; but of course that was not true, and could not be true of any one whose writings were so valuable as his. He had a wonderful library, chiefly ecclesiastical, and *he was well acquainted with it.* Seldom did a brother clergyman who wanted any item of book-learning go away unsatisfied from a visit to him.

And how he welcomed us when we did go to him! How many there are who will always remember the delight of his welcome and the charm of his cordiality. If he was ever bored nobody found it out. His keen sense of humour and sharp wit did not minister to discourtesy and were not used to wound. If he must differ, he generally did so with the greatest kindness; and if he ever thought he had failed in this how prompt and generous he was in making amends!

In short, we cannot doubt that his whole time was not spent either in writ-

ing or in reading, or in conversation, but that he lived very near to our Lord and spent much time in prayer. This follower of St. Timothy, who from his youth had known the Holy Scriptures so well, who even in his early life was advanced to great honour, though not to chief office in the Church, who did great things notwithstanding his often infirmities, felt above all else the hidden joy of the presence of Jesus. With St. Thomas Aquinas he could say sincerely that he wished for nothing but the Lord Himself as his reward. While he was permitted to offer the Sacrifice of Love, and to receive the Lamb of God day by day, nothing was really hard to him; and when his bodily ills prevented that, without doubt the Almighty Saviour had His own glorious way of turning even the deprivation into a boon. For in truth He loves those who love Him.

These things are easily gathered from their personal intercourse with him by those who had that privilege, and they are many. But yet many more than they can testify that the power of his zeal, his piety and his learning were spread abroad throughout our American Church and also in England; and not only so, but without his name his knowledge and his thoughts were freely given in all directions, in writings that were not signed. He cared not for fame, but for the truth. His great desire was that the members of our true and holy branch of the Church Catholic everywhere should know the truth God reveals by her, and that knowing it they should be made free to practice all that grows out of that knowledge.

Had he faults? Did he make mistakes? It is not for us to say Yes or No to either question. But that he was singularly gifted and that he answered with great devotion to the responsibilities which his gifts imposed upon him, no one can doubt. And it is both for the talents and for the use he made of them that we glorify God.

Not only in the departments of scholarship and teaching did Dr. Percival give himself to God's service. His practical sacrifices and benevolence are in no small degree open to our view, notwithstanding the unostentatious modesty with which his good works were done. How many priests to-day know, and remember with great thankfulness, not only that he advised and strengthened them but that he even took them up and carried them through the difficulties of the beginning of their courses—that in an important sense he made them what they are! Happy are they who have had him for their Gamaliel! There is nothing shaky about their foundation. Always ready, not only to give, but to find others to give, to any holy work, and so aiding with great generosity many holy enterprises, yet the Church of the Evangelists, rebuilt by his efforts and St. Elizabeth's entirely founded, are singular examples of what one who believes with all his heart can do for God and for his brethren.

And having said all this, with the deep consciousness that much more might

be said if we knew more, it remains to mention that which is probably the crowning work of this noble life. The builders of churches were great benefactors; the doctors who have left valuable writings are, it may be, greater. But greatest of all, surely, are they who have left the Lord's Sacred Name written in the fleshy tables of men's hearts, who have founded and inspired the continuance of communities devoted to the untiring service of the most Holy Saviour and Redeemer of mankind. We pray for the revival and increase of what is technically called the Religious Life in our Church. We long to witness at least the extension among us of that form of devotion which in the end shall fill the Church, as in the first days, with holy and sincere cenobites, especially priests. One such community, the Companions of the Most Holy Saviour, Henry Robert Percival may be said, in an important sense, to have founded—and all the victorious prayers and praises that now and in the future shall ascend from their pure and unearthly habitation, all the sacrifices and good works for our Lord and his people that shall grow out of the devotion of those who in all generations shall offer themselves to God in that religious house to be the Master's faithful Companions, shall illumine the memory of Henry Percival in the sight of God and men. Although he could not himself be corporally one of them, yet he has been their nursing father.

All these glorious things, and more, God wrought in his servant in less than fifty years; and those not years of bodily vigour, but of distressing and often disabling sickness. Many hundreds of years of the lives of ordinary Christians may not have accomplished so much. At last, as much as a year before his death, it began to be evident to those who observed him closely that the goal was in sight. He himself said, when he went to Devon in the spring, that he did not expect to return. Just when the nights were made equal to the days and the world's natural repose was beginning, on the 22nd of September, the faithful servant of God was permitted to depart in peace. Where is he now? In joy and felicity we may be sure. Whatever defilements he may have contracted which are now being purged and done away by the Blood of the Immaculate Lamb, as our dear brother himself most devoutly anticipated—yet in the midst of that purgation, if so it must be, he is in unspeakable joy and felicity. And that joy and felicity are not only for the cleansing, but especially for the beauty and glory of Christ's work done in his earthly life, in respect of which and for all the good works that follow he sings with all his heart, *Non nobis, Domine, non nobis: sed Nomini Tuo da gloriam.*

And now what do this holy example and these glorious works say to us?

1. Keep right on, ceaselessly and bravely, with the holy work so well begun. Because one watchman, and he such an effectual one, is withdrawn, watch ye and pray for the Faith all the more diligently.

2. Give attendance to reading, exhortation, doctrine—neglect not the gift that is in thee.

3. See that as many as possible are trained for the holy ministry—and that, being duly called, they are in all things furthered and fully furnished.

4. *Be sure that there is nothing in Rome.* Of course I do not mean that there is no true religion among Roman Catholics—for that would be a monstrous lie. But Dr. Percival's whole course, and his writings, seem to be continually asking this one question, Why not be a real Catholic instead of a Roman Catholic? It was not that he did not know the argument for the modern papacy. No one in the world knew it better or with less prejudice appreciated whatever force there may be in it. No one was more susceptible to the magnificence and the alluring beauty that glorifies the papalistic dream. His apprehension embraced to the full both the prose and the poetry which draws men to Rome—but God gave him also to see the truth—that Catholicity does not march with papalism. Read his *Doctrine of the Episcopal Church* and his *Glories of the Episcopal Church* and see for yourselves that however sonorous may have been the roaring of Leo from the Seven Hills, yet Canterbury is right in the main issue, and God is with her of a truth.

5. Learn fully that no Catholic doctrine or practice is to be feared or rejected because the Romanists are so fortunate as to possess it as well as we, and in some cases to appreciate it more thoroughly than we do and in others to abuse it to great evil. Read his masterly work on *the Invocation of Saints,* and determine whether you are willing to separate yourself in this matter from universal Catholicity and to forego the privilege of asking the citizens of Heaven to pray for you.

6. Learn to accept, with full zeal, all the propositions that have been given out by the infallible Voice of the whole Church. Read of the *Seven General Councils* in that volume which Dr. Percival has edited so faithfully and with so much ability—and not only so, but, taking his *Manual of Theology* as an index, discover for yourselves, by faithful study of the Holy Scriptures and the great writers of the Church, all that the Church as a body has said. Whoever devotes himself to the study of Catholic Theology, whatever else happens to him, he will be truly broadened.

7. Try in all things to realize the Communion of Saints—that in very deed, though not to outward sight, we are come to mount Zion, the Heavenly Jerusalem, and to all her glorious inhabitants, and are one with them—that we have not lost either the company or the help of the dear brother who is now in our minds, nor that of any, even the most glorious of all that have gone before—but that they are now holding us up by their mighty prayers as they never could do while they were on earth.